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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 000320

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SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER JACQUES EDOUARD ALEXIS RECEIVES LETTER OF INTERPELLATION

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Classified By: DCM Thomas C. Tighe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Chamber of Deputies has convoked the Prime Minister to answer questions February 28 on his government's policies to combat the rising cost of living and allegations of corruption. The session could end in several ways, to include: a vote of no confidence that brings down the government; in a vote that the Prime Minister survives and emerges from strengthened; in a cabinet reshuffle; or simply in heightened parliamentary surveillance over government economic policy. None of the major parties support this interpellation but have little power to enforce discipline on their deputies. A vote of no confidence definitely would delay already late senate elections, and potentially upset the relative political stability achieved by the Preval administration in the past two years. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Haiti's 1987 constitution (Article 129-2) allows a very small number of parliamentarians of either chamber to interpellate individual ministers or the Prime Minister, and submit one or more ministers or the entire government to a vote of no confidence. An absolute majority vote of either chamber can dismiss the entire government (Article 129-4). This latest effort was the initiative of eight deputies. On February 14, Deputy Isidor Joseph Mercier (Rally for Progressive National Democrats/RDNP, Grand'Anse) made a motion requesting the lower house of parliament to exercise its constitutional prerogative and issue a letter of interpellation to Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis. Deputy Isidor's motion was seconded by seven other Deputies from different political parties - Ronald Etienne (National Reconstruction Front/FRN, Grand'Anse); Dort Jean Pressoir (Artibonite en Action/LAAA, Artibonite); Denize Aristhene (Alyans, South); Emmanuel Fritz-Gerald Bourjolly (Fusion, South); Edmond Dormeus (RDNP, Artibonite); Sorel Francois (Fanmi Lavalas/FL, West); and Acklush Louis-Jeune (Struggling People's Party/OPL, Grand'Anse). The Deputies justified their request for the interpellation on the government's inability to check the rising cost of living. Originally scheduled for February 21, the interpellation was moved to February 28. The PM faces the risk of his government falling if a vote of no-confidence succeeds.

¶3. (SBU) In a meeting with Poloff February 21, Deputy Sorel Francois said that in addition to the unchecked high cost of living, the PM was being summoned to reply to allegations of misallocation of government funds. Francois claimed the PM diverted 1.1 billion Haitian gourdes that Deputies previously

voted in the 2008 budget for the municipalities. (Note: PM Alexis announced before the Senate February 14 that the 1.1 billion Haitian gourdes would be applied to an ongoing program called "Communal Impact Projects." It is unclear why Francois views this as a diversion of funds by the PM. End note.) Additionally, Francois claimed that the PM in December 2007 forced the Minister of Planning, Max Bellerive, to disburse 115 million Haitian gourdes to the Minister of the Interior and 110 million Haitian gourdes to the Minister of Social Affairs. While these funds were previously earmarked for disaster response, the PM allegedly ordered their use by his own "inner circle." Francois raised further corruption allegations against the PM. He stated that PM Alexis in January withdrew 39 million gourdes from the Ministry of Planning, and channeled this money to Rene Momplaisir and other partisans to prepare for Alexis' potential 2011 run for the presidency.

¶4. (SBU) The political community remains divided on the PM's interpellation. Vice President of the Chamber of Deputies, Eloune Doreus (OPL, Northwest) told Poloff February 20 that he credits the Alexis government with restoring security to Haiti and is personally opposed to disrupting the government at this time. However, he is concerned the deputies may hold a vote of no confidence not because they believe it to be the best solution to government ills, but rather in an act of "solidarity" with other deputies: a vote in favor of the PM would be equivalent to a vote against the deputies who had signed the letter, and therefore against the Chamber of Deputies. Many deputies would vote to censure the PM simply to show their team spirit. Doreus noted that he has not received any pressure from OPL party leadership to vote either for or against the censure.

¶5. (SBU) A majority of the upper house of parliament has voiced opposition to the interpellation. Senate President Kely Bastien (Lespwa, West) informed Poloffs on February 15

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that he opposed the interpellation but remained powerless to change the Deputies' intentions. Bastien thought that a vote of no confidence would destabilize the government. He claimed Haiti without a government risked too much: further delaying the electoral law, senate elections, and the amended budget; and upsetting the meeting with international donors scheduled for April. Senator Jean Hector Anacasis (Lespwa, West) called for the Deputies to halt the interpellation. He agreed with Senate President Bastien that a vote of no confidence would destabilize the GOH. Anacasis recommended that a ministerial reshuffle would be more appropriate. Senators Joseph Lambert (Lespwa, Southeast) and Andris Riche (OPL, Grand'Anse) suggested the deputies give PM Alexis a specific deadline for marked improvements, and call him back in several months to demonstrate his government's progress.

¶6. (C) Fanmi Lavalas (FL) Senator Rudy Heriveaux on February 21 publicly stated his party believes the interpellation of PM Alexis was untimely and could potentially destabilize the government. He organized a meeting on February 18 with the FL Deputies to garner support for this position and to convince Deputy Sorel Francois, one of the initiators of the interpellation, to withdraw his support for this move - but to no avail as yet. Francois informed Poloff February 22 that Heriveaux scheduled meetings between PM Alexis and the individual FL Deputies for February 26 for the PM to personally try to convince them to change their positions. Francois claimed that Senator Heriveaux's position is being influenced by his close friendship to PM Alexis and not by concern for the welfare of the Haitian citizens.

¶7. (SBU) PM Alexis' own political party, Lespwa, has also expressed strong opposition to the interpellation. Lespwa Steering Committee Member Anes Lubin revealed to Poloff on February 22 that Lespwa views the interpellation of PM Alexis as unwarranted and the prospect of a vote of no confidence "inconceivable." They commend the economic progress that the

Alexis government has made despite the increasing cost of living. Lubin stated that PM Alexis' government had worked hard to curb inflation, create jobs and develop infrastructure. The next three years would be essential for consolidating these economic gains and for further economic development. Lubin stated that the consequence of a vote of no confidence would be a Preval administration with no Prime Minister and with a Senate that has not held elections (and hence lacks one-third of its members).

¶8. (SBU) Fusion does not support the interpellation of the Prime Minister but they will not take a stance against the deputies' decision, Fusion party spokesperson Micha Gaillard told Poloff February 20. In a separate though parallel move, Fusion plans to announce to President Preval its intention to "leave the government" if the GOH does not agree to make immediate changes to operating procedures. Fusion's principle complaint is that although the government is "plural," meaning the ministers represent several political parties, it does not operate like the true "coalition government" promised by Preval, in which political parties share responsibilities. Fusion wants to feel like it is "part of a team" and given occasion to help orient the GOH agenda. Gaillard said that "with or without Jacques Edouard Alexis as Prime Minister," Fusion will remain part of the government only if these concerns are addressed immediately.

¶9. (C) Comment: The rising cost of living has become a rallying issue for opponents of the Alexis government. Nevertheless, we see this particular effort as the work of individual hothead politicians rather than the expression of a real groundswell. There is a good chance that a majority in the Chamber of Deputies will come together against a vote of no confidence. A vote that brings down the government would further put back the already delayed elections for one-third of the Senate, and plunge Haiti into another - probably lengthy - political impasse. If PM Alexis survives such a vote, he could emerge strengthened, as the constitution allows only one such vote per year. There are also potential compromises, one of which would be a cabinet reshuffle in which the GOH replaces one or more of the weaker ministers. The Deputies could also simply submit the PM to a thorough grilling and then demand periodic reporting of progress on fighting inflation. In private conversation, the deputies appear fully aware of the destabilizing consequences of a vote of no confidence. However, logic does not always win out in the lower chamber, and so for the moment all options remain on the table. The potentially destabilizing effect of a vote of no confidence has so far failed to elicit

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a response from President Preval, whose influence could calm the situation should he desire.

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